

Washington bureau

By Luther Huston

BOOTH NEWSPAPERS

When one enters the Washington bureau of the Booth Newspapers he steps on a colorful rug that is a hand-woven replica of the great seal of the Wolverine state. Awareness that this is a Michigan-oriented news room is immediate and it deepens as one talks with Ray Stephens the bureau chief.

The Booth Newspapers, all eight of them, are in Michigan and the bureau provides them with a news report focused almost exclusively on what Michiganites are doing in Washington. Sometimes what they are doing ties in to a story of national interest, like Gerald Ford's elevation to the Vice Presidency, and then the bureau will do a national story with a definite Michigan angle.

The bureau's daily report goes only to the Booth newspapers but it supplies, in a way, a service to other Michigan papers who do not have or cannot afford their own Washington correspondent. This is done by means of a weekly newsletter, a combined product of the Washington and Lansing bureaus that is sold only to Michigan newspapers. The news letter is a compilation of major stories about the activities of federal and state governments during a given week. It is mailed from Ann Arbor every Friday.

The bureau does very little spot news coverage. It leaves that to AP and UPI, both of which serve the Booth papers. So, when Ford was named Vice President, the bureau flashed no bulletins for afternoon papers (All the Booth papers are p.m.'s) but it prepared a comprehensive story with all the Michigan angles it could dig up, for editions the following day.

Not counting the Vice President, there

are 21 members of the Senate and House from Michigan, some of whom wield power and influence as members of important committees. Senator Robert P. Griffin, for instance, is the minority whip, and Edward Hutchinson is the ranking Republican on the House Judiciary Committee which is conducting the impeachment investigation.

So, the bureau assigns two men to Congress, whose main job is keeping abreast of whatever goes on in the Michigan delegation. Ronald Cordray covers the House, and Robert Lewis, who is also assistant chief of the bureau, covers the Senate.

Feature stories

Stephens, Cordray and Lewis are the male members of the bureau. The distaff side is represented by Mrs. Mary Tuthill, who covers general assignments and writes feature stories. For example, in a recent newsletter, she wrote a story about the nation's only maker of quill pens who supplies the Supreme Court, his principal if not only customer. By tradition, quill pens are before each Justice on the bench and on the bale in front of the bench where lawyers sit while awaiting their turn to argue cases.

Stephens had never worked for the Booth papers before he became chief of the bureau in 1972. He had been with the Associated Press for 21 years and at the time he joined Booth was assistant chief in the AP's Washington bureau. He came to Washington in 1965, transferring from New York, so he brought to Booth a background of seven years familiarity with Washington, an asset for any bureau manager.



RAY STEPHENS, chief of the Washington bureau of the Booth Newspapers.

Stephens writes a weekly political column, edits the Washington end of the weekly news letter and, in collaboration with Bud Vestal of the Lansing bureau, edited "Jerry Ford Up Close", the first book about the Vice President, which will be published in June and serialized by the *New York Times*.

The offices of the Booth Bureau are luxurious by customary newspaper standards, and equipped with very modern devices, even the typewriters and the telephones are varicolored.

The bureau transmits its news report to Ann Arbor by a computer, one of the few, if any, operated by a Washington news bureau, involving processes too complex for a reporter who never even learned the Morse code to understand.